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NATIVE AMERICAN LAITY SEE MINISTRY NEEDS

NEW YORK -- A conviction that the local body should be responsible for its own mission undergirded the responses of two Native American Episcopal groups to a survey about ministry.

Steve Charleston, Indian Ministries staff officer at the Episcopal Church Center, explained that the survey was part of a project undertaken by the National Committee on Indian Work to explore the extent and needs of ministry among native Americans. Strong participation by the laity of both the Navajoland Area Mission and the Oneida community of Wisconsin resulted in his report.

Charleston pointed out that there were obvious differences in the two responding groups: the Navajoland answers represented a variety of congregations throughout the reservation area while the Oneida group consists of one large tightly-knit congregation. In spite of this, he said, there were some common interests and needs that surfaced.

Both communities expressed a need for trained Native American priests and for programs to get more people into their churches. The sparseness of reservation life was a concern that surfaced in the need for recreational programs for young people. Both communities expressed eagerness to do the work involved in maintaining their plants and developing these programs and both asked for funds for the necessary raw materials and equipment.

Both communities expressed satisfaction with their worship but some of the respondents said that they had never been visited in their homes by a priest, a symptom of the shortage of priests and the vast distances. Lay readers take an active role in both groups.

In matters of stewardship they expressed the need for basic materials to teach the concept to Native Americans. Most agreed that people should either tithe or make some regular financial commitment but many felt that few members of their congregations really understood stewardship.

Charleston said that the committee was gratified at the care and thoughtfulness that the laity put into answering the survey. "It indicates a level of commitment and concern that we hope to be able to use to the benefit of the whole ministry."

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